

Destination Health: Tips to Stay on Course



Depression is more than just sadness – it is a medical illness. A wide variety of symptoms are common in depression, including loss of energy, sleep disturbance, agitation, inability to concentrate, feelings of worthlessness and loss of interest in pleasurable activities. Although the cause of depression is not fully understood, it is thought to involve a chemical imbalance in the parts of the brain that control mood and emotion.

Depression is a treatable illness. Just as depression does not develop overnight, it will likely take considerable time to get and stay better.

Starting antidepressant treatment is an important decision.

Now that your doctor has prescribed medication for you, there are some things you should consider to help you become as healthy as you can possibly be.

Dr. Mark J. Berber

MD, MRCGP, MRCPsych, FRCPC
Consultant Psychiatrist, Markham Stouffville Hospital
Lecturer in Psychiatry, University of Toronto
Toronto, Ontario

Dr. Sanjive Jain

MD, Family Physician, Oshawa, Ontario
Active Staff, Markham Stouffville Hospital



- Depression is often related to changes in brain chemistry. Medication can help restore brain chemistry to normal.
- Depression is not your fault. There may be genetic factors underlying your condition or making you more vulnerable to stress.



- Taking antidepressants is a little like flying in an airplane – extra caution is required during takeoff and landing. That's why your doctor has probably started your therapy at a low dose, with an increase to the usual dose after 5 to 7 days. Your doctor will continue to adjust the dose until you find the dose that's right for you. When the decision is made to stop antidepressant therapy your doctor will advise you on the safest way to discontinue your medication.



- Consistency is key. Take your medication every day to make sure the effect is sustained.
- Don't stop taking your medication without talking to your doctor first, even if you are feeling better. You could suffer a relapse (a return of depression) if you stop taking your medication too early.



- Antidepressants do not work overnight and the journey to a full and sustained recovery may be long. It takes 3 to 4 weeks for most people to begin to feel better. In some cases improvement takes longer to take hold.



- Side effects can occur with any medication. Experiencing some side effects shortly after starting antidepressant treatment is common. Side effects vary from one antidepressant to another but in many cases the side effects resolve as treatment continues (e.g., nausea). You should talk to your doctor about side effects so you know what might happen and what to do if they occur.



- Some people experience side effects when antidepressant treatment is being stopped or shortly thereafter. When planning to stop treatment, be sure to follow the guidance of your doctor.
- Treatment for depression involves more than just medication. Your doctor may also use talking therapies, relaxation techniques, stress management and/or lifestyle changes (e.g., exercise, cutting out caffeine) to help you on the road to wellness.

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